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30 April 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Dissemination Control Branch, DD/CR

FROM : Chief, Publications Staff, ORR

SUBJECT : **Release of CIA/RR GM 65-2, International Boundaries of Indochina, March 1965, Secret, to Foreign Governments**

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/RR GM 65-2
March 1965

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES OF INDOCHINA

DOCUMENT NO. 1
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
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CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
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AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 4/19/79 REVIEWER: 035377

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES OF INDOCHINA

Active or potential disagreement exists on the alignments of several of the international boundaries of former Indochina. Recently published North Vietnamese maps, for example, depict the North Vietnam - Laos boundary differently from official US and French maps. Similarly, annotated boundary maps transmitted to the United States by Cambodia indicate important differences between the official Cambodian and South Vietnamese versions of their mutual boundary. This memorandum constitutes a report on the status of all boundaries in Indochina, with special attention to their historical origins and the points of current instability.

Background

Indochina has eight international boundaries (counting the Laotian boundary with North Vietnam and South Vietnam as a single boundary), in addition to the provisional military demarcation line between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. No active dispute concerns the exterior boundaries of Indochina -- those with China, Burma, and Thailand -- which for most of their extent are demarcated.* Thailand accepts its boundary with Cambodia, however, only on a de facto basis and maintains a rather vague reservation concerning the 1962 International Court of Justice (ICJ) acknowledgment of Cambodian sovereignty over the Preah Vihear Temple site on the border. The interior boundaries -- those between the component states of former Indochina -- are generally undemarcated and consequently susceptible to dispute. The potential for trouble is illustrated by Cambodia's repeated protests against attacks on Cambodian border villages by South Vietnamese armed forces. Another source of trouble between Cambodia and South Vietnam is the dispute that has persisted for the last decade as to the ownership of islands in the Gulf of Siam. Most recently, North Vietnam's cartographic claims to the Laotian area west of the Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) appear to provide the basis for its accusations that Laotian aircraft are bombing "North Vietnamese" towns in that area.

All of the boundaries and the conflicting national attitudes toward them have important roots in Indochina's colonial history. As shown on Figure 1, Indochina in the late 17th century comprised the deteriorating Cambodian (Khmer) Kingdom, Laos, the remains of the Kingdom of Champa, and the separate Kingdoms of Tonkin and Cochin China -- the former Annamite Empire (Kingdom of Dai-co-viet, known to the Chinese as An-nan, "the pacified south"). During the 17th century, huge walls thai for 150 years separated the Kingdom of Tonkin from the Kingdom of Cochin China were built across the Quang Tri plain a few miles north of the present Demarcation Line. At that time Cambodia extended northward from the Gulf of Siam almost to 109 and encompassed the southwestern portion of present-day Laos that lies west of the Mekong River, as well as the present-day provinces of Sédone and Attopeu, which are east of the river. Eastward, the Cambodian Kingdom extended far into present-day South Vietnam. Cambodia's current mainland territorial claims against South Vietnam are based on this historical expanse of the Cambodian Kingdom. Further, the presence of many ethnic Khmer (Khmer Krom) in South Vietnam, a factor that still complicates the Cambodian-Vietnamese relationship, dates from this era.

* A demarcated boundary is one that has been marked physically on the ground with official pillars or other devices. A boundary established by a set line, such as the thalweg (line of the deepest navigable channel), in or along a water body also may be regarded as demarcated.

Figure 1.
Indochina in the late 17th century.

Figure 2.
Indochina about 1860, following areas of Cambodia and Laos under Siamese sovereignty.

Figure 3.
Indochina, 1940.

Figure 4.
Areas ceded to France by Thailand, March 1941 (subsequently returned by 1946 settlement agreement).

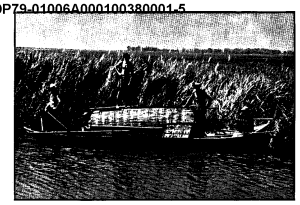

Figure 5. Plain of Reeds
View of terrain and vegetation in area between Song (River) Vam Co Dong and Song Vam Co Tay, near Cambodia-South Vietnam border. In such an environment, the location of an undemarcated boundary is extremely difficult to determine.

Figure 6. Aerial View of Limestone Area
A portion of the great limestone belt, a skyline's level that bisects Laos and extends across Vietnam-Laos border southeast of Dien (Yen) Ba (Ba Lom Map 5052I). In this area, France delimited the boundary in a straight line because drainage is subterranean and conventional water divides are lacking.

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By the beginning of the 19th century the Annamite emperor had reunited Tonkin and Cochin China into a single country that extended into the Mekong Delta, which the Cambodians had been forced to evacuate. In the latter part of the 19th century, France, whose interest in Indochina dated from the arrival of French missionaries in the early 17th century, demanded a halt to the persecution of Christian converts by the Annamite government. The persecutions continued, and France finally defeated Annam by military force. Siam, taking advantage of the Annamite defeat, then consolidated its control in the area of the middle Mekong River and the adjoining parts of Laos and northern Cambodia (see Figure 2) and threatened to advance eastward to the sea at Vinh but was forced back by French troops. Between 1893 and 1907 Siam ceded the following three areas to France: In 1893, all territory on the left bank* of the Mekong River and islands in the river; in 1902, the areas of the present-day Laotian provinces of Sayaboury, Champasak, and Sithandone -- all on the right bank of the Mekong River; and in 1907, the former Cambodian provinces of Angkor and Battambang, which France had relinquished to Siam in 1867.

The other exterior boundaries of Indochina were settled during the period 1887-96. Between 1887 and 1895 China agreed to the delimitation** and demarcation of what are now the North Vietnam - China boundary and the Laos - China boundary. In 1896 Great Britain and France agreed to use the Mekong River as the border between Laos and Burma.

By the close of the 19th century, France had thus created a colonial entity consisting of Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China, Cambodia, and Laos (see Figure 3). Except for minor boundary changes between these components that were largely the result of French administrative actions, this was the Indochina that was conquered by Japan in 1941.

The Japanese Government, in late 1940, encouraged Thailand to attack Indochina and then, in March 1941, acted as arbitrator to a dispute that resulted in Thailand reacquiring territory from Laos and Cambodia (see Figure 4). In 1946 these territories were returned to Laos and Cambodia by the Washington Accord between France and Siam. No changes in Indochina's exterior boundaries have been made since this agreement, other than the 1962 ICJ decision on the site of the Preah Vihear Temple.

Summary analyses of both the interior and exterior boundaries of Indochina are given on the reverse side of this memorandum.***

* The banks of a river are designated as right or left as one faces downstream.
** A delimited boundary is one whose alignment has been agreed upon and described in a treaty or other formal document. The fact that a boundary is delimited does not mean that it is demarcated or that it can even be located on the ground with precision.
*** More detailed discussion of the boundaries of the individual countries treated here may be found in the International Boundary Study series prepared by the Office of the Geographer, Department of State.

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Interior Boundaries

Vietnam--Laos Boundary

The Laos boundary with North Vietnam is in dispute. The entire Vietnam - Laos boundary was delimited and surveyed by France before the dissolution of French Indochina but its was never been demarcated. The boundary is 1,336 miles long. For almost 1,150 miles it coincides with the primary drainage divide of the mountains of northern Indochina and the Chaîne Annamitique and with minor divides within the minimals ranges. Rivers and streams form the boundary for another 186 miles, and two straight-line segments (see Figure 7) totaling 38 miles complete the boundary. In the vicinity of the upper course of the Sê Kamane, the easternmost point on the Vietnam - Laos frontier, the exact location of the boundary is unknown for a distance of approximately 52 miles, even though the entire boundary presumably has been surveyed. US Government cartographic policy is to show this segment of the boundary by means of an "indefinite" boundary symbol along the drainage divide.

North Vietnamese maps published in 1964 differ markedly from US and French Government maps in their delineation of five sectors of the Vietnam - Laos boundary (see Map 51029).* Two discrepancies are the result of North Vietnamese reliance upon other, inaccurate French map sources. These two involve the sector of the boundary extending northward from the tripjunction of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to about 10°9'N and (2) the sector from about 104°45'E to 105°15'E. A third discrepancy involves a triangular area at about 104°45'E 105°45'N, for which no cartographic or other logical explanation is apparent.

The remaining two areas of difference in boundary alignment appear to be deliberate cartographic misrepresentations by North Vietnam, possibly as a basis for claiming land that now belongs to Laos. One of these areas is bisected by Route 7 where it crosses the North Vietnam - Laos frontier. The North Vietnamese map shows the border 2 to 3 miles west of its position on French and US Government maps.

The last of the five areas of boundary discrepancy is the most important. This is the segment that is bisected by the 17th parallel; part of it forms the western limits of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and is currently in dispute, as evidenced by North Vietnamese claims that "their" villages are being bombed although the villages named are in Laos, west of the border. In 1954 and again in 1958 North Vietnamese forces had occupied and claimed approximately the same area of Laos. The segment in question was originally established in October 1916, by decree of the Governor General of Indochina, to serve as the border between areas that were then the provinces of Quang Tri (Annam) and Savannakhet (Laos).** In 1937, after discovering Vietnamese agents of the court of Hué collecting taxes in the area west of the frontier, French authorities established an area of Vietnamese influence and ordered the Vietnamese not to penetrate beyond this area (see Maps 51029 and 512BO). The area was roughly in the form of an isosceles triangle with the straight segment of the boundary as the base line and the apex 23 kilometers (14.29 miles) west of the center of the base line. Although the line forming the triangle was never formally decreed as part of the boundary, it is significant that the villages that North Vietnam claims were being bombed as of late 1964 are generally within the limits of the northern half of this triangle and north of an imaginary extension of the Demarcation Line. The villages of Ban Hinc and Ban Trin were bombed by the Laotian Air Force in late 1964, but the Hanoi regime did not mention them by name, possibly because they are located south of the latitude of the Demarcation Line.

Cambodia--South Vietnam Boundary

Much of the boundary between Cambodia and South Vietnam is in dispute. The land sector was delimited by various French administrative actions beginning in the latter part of the 19th century. Although there is evidence that the southern segment (Cochin China) was demarcated in the 1870's, most of the markers apparently have been destroyed through either natural causes or deliberate actions of South Vietnam or Cambodia. A water boundary, in the sense of an agreed line dividing the various offshore islands, does not exist; instead, Cambodia and South Vietnam claim various islands, and in many instances their claims conflict.

Land Sector -- The land sector of the boundary between Cambodia and South Vietnam extends from the South Vietnam - Laos - Cambodia tripjunction southward for about 600 miles to the Gulf of Siam. The northern portion, bordering the South Vietnam highlands, is generally aligned along drainage divides. The southern portion, through the flat Mekong Delta, is more complex in alignment, as the various segments follow rivers, right or left banks of rivers and canals, and straight lines. The difficulty of locating the boundary in the Mekong Delta is compounded by the uniform appearance of the flat terrain, particularly when seasonal floodwaters have submerged distinguishing landmarks (see Figure 6).

In March 1960, Cambodia furnished the United States with annotated sheets of the French Service Géographique map series at 1:100,000 that showed the official Cambodian boundary claim. A comparison of this boundary alignment with the alignment accepted by South Vietnam, which is shown on many recently published French maps of the same series, reveals seven areas of difference in Cambodian and South Vietnamese claims (see Map 51010). All of them are minor and probably are only differences in cartographic representation.

In January 1965, however, Cambodia in a note to South Vietnam advanced claims to several areas of South Vietnam that she had claimed historically but that had been ceded to Vietnam through various French decrees. These included: (1) part of the Cambodian province of Stung Treng, which was incorporated into Darlac Province of Annam in 1899, (2) four districts (cantons) in the Lac Hiep area, which were annexed to Cochin China by decrees of 1913 and 1914, (3) certain areas in the vicinity of Tay Ninh, which were annexed to Cochin China in 1859-70, (4) the enclave between the Vaico Oriental (Song Vam Co Dong) and the Vaico Occidental (Song Vam Co Tay), which was given to Cochin China in 1870, and (5) the communes of Koh Thalouh and Saky, near Ba Thau, on the Gulf of Siam, which were given to Cochin China by a decree of 1921.

* The most detailed map coverage of the Vietnam - Laos boundary and the Cambodia - South Vietnam boundary is provided by selected sheets of the Army Map Service Series 1701, 1701L, and 1702 at 1:250,000. Publication of all sheets relating to the boundaries south of the 17th parallel was scheduled for completion by 15 March 1965.

** The decree stated that "the border starts at Peak 1921 and follows from north to south 1158°! until it meets bench mark 1920 M SE of Dong Ba Pac." (The confusional system sometimes used for French mapping expresses coordinates in grads rather than degrees, 400 grads being equal to 360 degrees; longitude is based on Paris rather than Greenwich.) Actually the boundary follows 115W58.5', and this meridian was used on the map attached to the 1954 Geneva Armistice Agreement, which created the DMZ; the map was accepted by all signers of the agreement, including Pham Van Dong, who signed for North Vietnam and is now its premier.

Speculation as to why Cambodia has seen fit to raise these claims at this time ranges from the feeling that the claims may be a sop to the Khmer Krom, the ethnic Cambodians native to South Vietnam, to the belief that Prince Sihanouk sees them as an aggressive counter to South Vietnamese claims to islands in the Gulf of Siam. In his speech to the Cambodian National Congress on 26 December 1964 Sihanouk claimed that he had not been possible to sign boundary agreements with the Hanoi regime and the Communist National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL) chiefly because the Communist negotiators at Peiping had rejected Cambodian requests for special minority treatment for the Khmer Krom.

Water Sector -- Cambodia's island claims, portrayed on an annotated French nautical chart, Iles Poulo Ubi à la Pointe de Kâ Pey, transmitted to the United States in 1964, conflict with South Vietnam's claims as indicated by the seaward extension of the international boundary on South Vietnamese-produced maps (see Map 51029). South Vietnamese claims to Hon Phu Dau, Hon Hoce, and Hon Ashay probably are most disturbing to Cambodia, as these islands are strategically close to the Cambodian mainland. Several of the islands claimed by Cambodia have been occupied by South Vietnamese forces at various times since 1956. Cambodia claims offshore territorial waters within 7 nautical miles (8.75 statute miles).

Available evidence indicates that in the middle of the 19th century all of the islands in question belonged to Cambodia. Some time after 1862, France chose to make a colony of France in mid-1949, Ile de Milieu, Ile à Deux, Ile du Fé, Ile de Phu Quoc, and some other islands in the Gulf of Siam came under the administration of the Governor of Cochin China. Disagreement over administration of the islands apparently continued into the early 20th century. Finally, in January 1939 the Governor General of Indochina decreed that the limits of insular administrative responsibility of Cambodia and Cochin China, respectively, would be defined by a straight line extending seaward from the mainland near Ha Tien at a bearing of 224 degrees, except in the vicinity of Ile de Phu Quoc where the line looped 5 kilometers (1.62 nautical miles) north of the island in order to include the water-covered reefs under Indochinese administration. All islands north of the line were to be administered by Cambodia, and those to the south were to be administered by Cochin China. The decree was intended to facilitate administration of the islands and expressly disavowed any intention of attempting to divide them on the basis of sovereignty.

Although the 1939 decision is now accepted as an administrative device, it is noteworthy that as recently as 1957 some Cambodian officials, including the Navy Chief of Staff, accepted the Governor General's line as a de facto boundary. This acceptance may have juridical significance in view of the precedent set by the 1962 decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to award the Preah Vihear Temple boundary area to Cambodia on the ground that Thailand as well as Cambodia had acknowledged past acceptance of the delimitation of that boundary as shown on a specific map.

Laos--Cambodia Boundary

The Laos - Cambodia boundary was delimited by various French declarations of protection and by internal administrative actions of the former French Indochinese Government rather than by the usual international agreements. No demarcation has been effected, but the boundary segment west of the Mekong River follows the Dumle Regos and technically may be considered demarcated. There appears to be no dispute between Laos and Cambodia concerning this boundary. Representation of the boundary on North Vietnamese-produced maps, however, differs from that on current official US and French maps, presumably because the Vietnamese maps were compiled from older, inaccurate French maps.

The boundary extends westward about 136 miles from its junction with the South Vietnam boundary at 10°54'N 106°13'E to its junction with the Thai boundary at Col de Preah Chambok (pass) in the Chaîne des Dangrek (mountains). For most of its length the boundary follows drainage divides; elsewhere it is aligned along major and minor streams.

The first definition of the boundary was contained in the 1893 treaty between France and the Kingdom of Siam, by which France forced expanding Siam to give up all territory east of the Mekong River. As a result of this treaty, the former Cambodian province of Stung Treng (part of which now comprises the Cambodian provinces of Stung Treng and Ratanakiri) became part of French Laos. It retained this status until December 1904, when it was divided between Cambodia and Annam (now South Vietnam) by French administrative decree. In 1908 Siam ceded to France the territory on the right bank of the Mekong, which had belonged to Cambodia in the 18th century, and this territory became the southwestern part of Laos. It seems virtually certain that French administrative action defined the Laos - Cambodia boundary by administrative action after 1904.

The primary source for the delineation of the Laos - Cambodia boundary is the Carte de l'Indochine 1:100,000 published by the French Service Géographique de l'Indochine. An older map series, Carte Générale de l'Indochine at 1:400,000, published by the Institut Géographique National (Paris), portrays the boundary inaccurately.

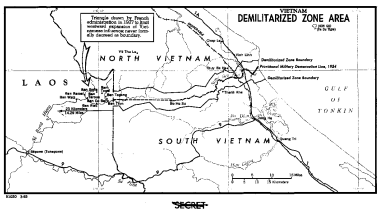
Vietnam Demarcation Line

The Vietnam Demarcation Line is not an international boundary. It is a provisional line approximately 47 miles long that implements the partition effected by the agreement on Cessation of Hostilities signed at Geneva on 20 July 1954. This agreement brought an end to hostilities between the French Union-Vietnamese Forces and Forces of the Viet Minh. The line follows the course of the Song Ben Hai from its mouth to the village of Bo Ho Ha and then extends due west to the Vietnam - Laos boundary (see Map 51009).

A demilitarized zone that varies in width from somewhat less than 4 miles to almost 6 miles extends north and south of the Demarcation Line. The boundaries of this zone are delimited by Bulletin No. 11, issued on 13 September 1954 in accordance with the July 1954 agreement. East of the village of Thuy Ba Ha on the north and east of Ranh Hac village on the south, the limits of the zone have been marked by posts at intervals of 300 to 500 meters (975 to 1,625 feet). West of these villages, markers were to have been erected at 1-kilometer (0.62-mile) intervals, but there is no evidence that this work was accomplished.

A seaward extension of the Demarcation Line is provided for by Article 4 of the 1954 agreement, which provides that "the provisional military demarcation line between the two final regrouping zones is extended into the territorial waters by a line perpendicular to the general line of the coast." The governments of North Vietnam and South Vietnam differ, however, in their interpretation of the extent of territorial waters. North Vietnam defines the width of its territorial waters as 12 nautical miles, whereas South Vietnam recognizes only a 3-nautical mile limit.

The alignment of the Demarcation Line and the boundaries of the DMZ are shown on the 1:25,000 maps attached to the official agreement.


VIETNAM
DEMILITARIZED ZONE AREA
NORTH VIETNAM
LAOS
SOUTH VIETNAM
GULF OF TONKIN
Demilitarized Zone Boundary
Provisional Military Demarcation Line, 1954
Demilitarized Zone Boundary
Khe Sanh
Lang Vei
Ban Houei Sane
Ban Dong
Ban Hinc
Ban Trin
Ban Ken Kok
Ban Ken Tchene
Ban Ken Tchene Nam
Ban Ken Tchene Nord
Ban Ken Tchene Est
Ban Ken Tchene Sud
Ban Ken Tchene Ouest
Ban Ken Tchene Nord-Est
Ban Ken Tchene Nord-Ouest
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Ban Ken Tchene Sud-

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